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Abstracts in Master Theses: An Appraisal Perspective

评价理论视角下的硕士论文提要

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Synopsis

Appraisal Theory presents a system of semantic resources that explore, describe and explain the way language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal relationships. The three subsystems of Appraisal — Attitude, Engagement and Graduation — are explored in the present study. Based on contributions of previous studies and by making an Appraisal analysis of native English speakers' (NS) master thesis abstract samples and those of nonnative English speakers' (NNS), this thesis aims to analyze how linguistic elements realize Appraisal meanings, and to compare how NNS approximate to and differ from NS in realizing Appraisals.

The first part of the thesis is Introduction, in which the background, purpose and major contributions of the research, as well as the organization of the thesis, are put forward. The remainder of the thesis consists of three chapters plus a conclusion. Chapter One presents a detailed literature review which summarizes previous studies on abstracts, on Appraisal Theory and on NS and NNS. Chapter Two explains the theoretical framework — the Appraisal Theory. The subsystems of Attitude, Engagement and Graduation are illustrated in great detail. Moreover, due to the great influence of Bakhtin's Dialogism, Intertextuality and Heteroglossia on Appraisal Theory, these three concepts are also presented. Chapter Three analyzes the realizations of Appraisals in both NS and NNS corpora quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, a comparison of the frequency of Appraisal resources in the two corpora is made. In addition, the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the study, as well as the possible factors affecting NNS' use of Appraisals are tentatively explored at the end of this chapter. The conclusion sums up the similarities and differences between NS and NNS in realizing Appraisals and presents the implications and limitations of this study.

On the one hand, the research findings of this thesis indicate that NNS writers are aware of and capable of, to some extent though, employing Appraisal meanings to interact and align solidarity with their readers. On the other hand, the findings also

reflect that the Chinese postgraduates still have difficulties in achieving appropriateness in their wording in Appraisals. This inappropriateness may attribute to the complexity of Appraisals, the influence of cultural differences and the low language proficiency of NNS.

Key Words: Appraisal Theory; Master thesis abstract; Non/native English speaker (NNS/NS)

摘 要

评价理论是一个语义资源系统，用以研究、描述、解释语篇中的作者如何使用语言开展评价、定立态度、建构语篇角色和协调人际关系。在众多先前的研究基础之上，本文运用评价理论的三个子系统——态度、介入、级差对以英语为本族语者和英语为非本族语者的硕士论文提要进行了分析，旨在得出提要作者如何通过语言资源实现评价意义，以及比较本族语者与非本族语者在实现评价意义方面所存在的异同。

本文首先介绍此次研究的背景、目的以及本文的框架。第一章详细回顾以往对于提要、评价理论以及本族语与非本族语者的研究。第二章详尽描述评价理论这一理论框架，同时提及巴赫金的多声理论和互文性。第三章采用定量和定性分析相结合的方法分析并比较本族语与非本族语者硕士论文提要中评价意义的实现手段，进而探究影响非本族语者使用评价意义的因素。第四章则对第三章中得出的研究结果加以总结，阐述本文的理论意义和教学指导意义同时指出本文的不足之处。

本文研究结果表明，非本族语提要作者拥有通过使用评价意义与其读者达成一致的意识，并且在某种程度上能够使用评价资源与读者进行互动；另一方面也反映出非本族语者在“适当”地表达评价意义的遣词造句方面仍然存在困难，而这种“不适当”可能是由评价资源的复杂性、文化之间的差异性以及非本族语者英语水平不高等因素引起的。

关键词：评价理论；硕士学位论文提要；英语为非/本族语者

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Contents

Synopsis	I
Introduction	1
Chapter One Review of Relevant Studies	5
1.1 Studies on abstracts.....	5
1.2 Studies on NS and NNS	7
1.3 Studies on Appraisal Theory	9
Chapter Two The Theoretical Framework of Appraisal Theory	11
2.1 An overview of the Appraisal Theory	11
2.2 Key aspects of Appraisal Theory	13
2.2.1 Attitude.....	14
2.2.2 Engagement.....	22
2.2.3 Graduation.....	33
2.2.4 Summary	35
Chapter Three Appraisals in NS and NNS Master Thesis Abstracts	37
3.1 Data.....	37
3.1.1 Sampling.....	37
3.1.2 Data collection	38
3.1.3 Data analysis	39
3.2 Research findings.....	39
3.2.1 Attitude in NS and NNS corpora	40
3.2.2 Engagement in NS and NNS corpora	46
3.2.3 Graduation in NS and NNS corpora	58
3.3 Possible factors affecting NNS use of Appraisals.....	64
Conclusion	66
References	70
Acknowledgements	76

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要库

目 录

引言.....	1
第一章 相关研究回顾.....	5
1.1 对于提要的研究.....	5
1.2 对于本族语与非本族语者的研究.....	7
1.3 对于评价理论的研究.....	9
第二章 评价理论的理论框架.....	11
2.1 评价理论概览	11
2.2 评价理论子系统.....	13
2.2.1 态度.....	14
2.2.2 介入.....	22
2.2.3 级差.....	33
2.2.4 总结.....	35
第三章 本族语者与非本族语者评价意义实现的对比分析.....	37
3.1 语料.....	37
3.1.1 样本选择.....	37
3.1.2 语料搜集.....	38
3.1.3 语料分析.....	39
3.2 研究结果分析.....	39
3.2.1 态度资源的异同.....	40
3.2.2 介入资源的异同.....	46
3.2.3 级差资源的异同.....	58
3.3 影响非本族语者使用评价手段的因素.....	64
结论.....	66
参考书目.....	70
致谢.....	76

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要库

Figures and Tables

Figure 1 An overview of Appraisal resources.....	14
Figure 2 Summary of options available within Attitude system.....	16
Table 1 Judgement — Social Esteem.....	19
Table 2 Judgement — Social Sanction.....	19
Table 3 Types of Appreciation.....	22
Figure 3 Judgement and Appreciation as institutionalized Affect.....	23
Figure 4 The Engagement system.....	27
Figure 5 Force: Intensification — Quality and Process.....	35
Figure 6 Distribution of Appraisals in NS and NNS corpora.....	40
Table 4 Distribution of Appraisals in NS and NNS corpora.....	40
Figure 7 Distribution of Attitude Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	41
Table 5 Distribution of Attitude Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	41
Figure 8 Distribution of Appreciation Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	42
Table 6 Distribution of Appreciation Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	43
Figure 9 Distribution of Engagement Resources in NS and NNS corpora	47
Table 7 Distribution of Engagement Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	47
Figure 10 Distribution of Disclaim Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	48
Table 8 Distribution of Disclaim Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	48
Figure 11 Distribution of Proclaim Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	51
Table 9 Distribution of Proclaim Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	51
Figure 12 Distribution of Entertain Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	52
Table 10 Distribution of Entertain Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	52
Figure 13 Distribution of Attribute Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	56
Table 11 Distribution of Attribute Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	56
Figure 14 Distribution of Graduation Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	59
Table 12 Distribution of Graduation Resources in NS and NNS corpora.....	59
Figure 15 Distributions of Force and Focus in NS and NNS corpora.....	60
Figure 16 Distribution of grading Modality in NS and NNS corpora.....	61
Table 13 Distribution of grading Modality in NS and NNS corpora.....	62
Table 14 A summary of the similarities and differences between the realizations of Appraisals in NS and that in NNS.....	67

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要库

图 表

图 1. 评价资源纵览·····	14
图 2. 态度系统实现手段总结·····	16
表 1. 判断——社会评判·····	19
表 2. 判断——社会约束·····	19
表 3. 鉴赏系统·····	22
图 3. 判断、鉴赏与情感的关系·····	23
图 4. 介入系统·····	27
图 5. 语势系统：强调——质量和过程·····	35
图 6. 本族语与非本族语者提要中评价手段的分布·····	40
表 4. 本族语与非本族语者提要中评价手段的分布·····	40
图 7. 本族语与非本族语者提要中态度资源的分布·····	41
表 5. 本族语与非本族语者提要中态度资源的分布·····	41
图 8. 本族语与非本族语者提要中鉴赏手段的分布·····	42
表 6. 本族语与非本族语者提要中鉴赏手段的分布·····	43
图 9. 本族语与非本族语者提要中介入资源的分布·····	47
表 7. 本族语与非本族语者提要中介入资源的分布·····	47
图 10. 本族语与非本族语者提要中否定手段的分布·····	48
表 8. 本族语与非本族语者提要中否定手段的分布·····	48
图 11. 本族语与非本族语者提要中宣称手段的分布·····	51
表 9. 本族语与非本族语者提要中宣称手段的分布·····	51
图 12. 本族语与非本族语者提要中接受手段的分布·····	52
表 10. 本族语与非本族语者提要中接受手段的分布·····	52
图 13. 本族语与非本族语者提要中归因手段的分布·····	56
表 11. 本族语与非本族语者提要中归因手段的分布·····	56
图 14. 本族语与非本族语者提要中级差资源的分布·····	59
表 12. 本族语与非本族语者提要中级差资源的分布·····	59
图 15. 本族语与非本族语者提要中语势和聚焦的分布·····	60
图 16. 本族语与非本族语者提要中情态手段量值的分布·····	61
表 13. 本族语与非本族语者提要中情态手段量值的分布·····	62
表 17. 本族语与非本族语者提要中评价手段异同总结·····	67

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Introduction

The study of academic discourse has long been the interest of linguists, and a great many of work produced in this area has equipped researchers with a better understanding of various aspects of this genre. Abstracts, one sub-genre of academic discourse, play an important role in the academic discourse community. It is the first part after the title in a paper, and it has a critical function of helping the reader to decide on its relevance for his own interests so as to decide to read it or not.

In order to survive in the fierce competition for publication purpose, abstract writers have tended to foreground their main claims and to carefully present themselves as competent. In order to catch the reader's attention and persuade them to read on, they need to demonstrate that they have something that is novel, significant and worthwhile to impart to the academic field, by means of which they aim to create a sense of professional credibility to achieve recognition. Therefore, the study of abstracts is worthwhile.

Previous studies on abstracts have offered a variety of perspectives from the language features to the interpersonal meaning encoded in this genre. These different approaches have provided researchers with a better understanding of this particular genre and are useful especially for academic purposes. However, few studies have been made on the comparison of abstracts in native English-speaking (NS) and nonnative English-speaking (NNS) masters' theses under the framework of Appraisal Theory. Therefore, the present study attempts to make such a contribution. Through the comparison of the subsystems of Appraisal — Attitude, Engagement and Graduation, the author aims to illustrate how Appraisal resources function to align solidarity with readers in abstracts of academic discourse. Hence, the research questions of this thesis are:

1. What are the devices employed by the native English-speaking postgraduates and the non-native English-speaking postgraduates, and Chinese postgraduates in particular, in realizing Appraisals?
2. How are these devices distributed in thesis abstracts?

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